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TAGS: [KMPI](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [XF](#)  
SUBJECT: MEDIA ASSISTANCE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST: WORKSHOP  
YIELDS ADVICE/ACCLAIM FOR MEPI

¶1. SUMMARY: An October 4 - 6 Regional Media Assistance workshop in Abu Dhabi, funded by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and USAID, succeeded in soliciting an abundance of ideas and insights from Middle Eastern media experts. Participants were frank about the need for a more independent and professional media industry in the region, and appreciative of this U.S. effort to seek their opinions and recommendations. NEA/PI and USAID will now turn to drafting a Scope of Work reflective of the themes that emerged from the workshop, which in turn should draw grant proposals that address some of the views expressed by participants.

¶2. UAE Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed supported the goals of the workshop and attended Ambassador Sison's reception for the participants. The workshop received positive press play in major Emirati dailies, with no accusations of U.S. pressure or "imposing" reform on the region. Provided the challenges some non-GCC nationalities faced obtaining visas can be addressed, the UAE would be a desirable venue for future programs and events aimed at Media reform. A recap of the workshop from NEA/PI organizer and participant Ross Kaplan follows. END SUMMARY.

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WORKSHOP RECAP  
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¶3. From October 4-6, media professionals, media development NGOs, and donors attended a MEPI-sponsored regional media workshop in Abu Dhabi entitled "Strategies for Sustainable Media Development for the Middle East and North Africa." Attendees included publishers, broadcast executives, editors, journalists, directors from media development NGOs, and media and civil society advisors from donor agencies.

The International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) implemented this workshop and demonstrated reliability and professionalism. USAID provided technical advice in development of agenda, participant list, and drafted the scope of work for this event.

14. The following list comprises 15 participants from 12 NEA countries, 5 donors representing 4 donor agencies, 5 implementers, and 1 international media expert. Late visa submissions due to late substitutions for Moroccan and Tunisian participants resulted in the inability to obtain visas for these 2 participants. Bahraini participant withdrew his participation to report on the sudden closing of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. Lebanese participant had last-minute medical emergency preventing his attendance. Yemeni participant was unable to obtain visa due to an apparently new visa restriction whereby Yemeni nationals may not receive visas via private sponsorship. Yemeni participated via conference call.

Mahmoud Abdulhadi, Qatar: Director, Al-Jazeera Media Training & Development Center  
Nadia Alami, USA: Regional Director, MENA, Internews  
Mohammed Al-Jassem, Kuwait: Editor-in-Chief, Al-Watan  
Dahem Al-Qahtani, Kuwait: Journalist, Al-Rai Al-Aam  
Walid Al-Sagqaf, Yemen: Editor in Chief, Yemen Times (via conference call)  
Rafiah Altalei, Oman: Editor in Chief, Al Emra'a magazine  
Hussein Amin, Egypt: Chair, AUC-Journalism Dept.  
Edward J Baumeister, France: International Media Consultant  
Zouaoui Benhamadi, Algeria: Head, Algerian National Radio  
Nart Bouran, UAE: News Center Director, Abu Dhabi TV  
Patrick Butler, USA: International Center for Journalists  
Janblat Chkai, Syria: Correspondent Al-Rai al-Aam  
Said Essoulami, Morocco: Centre for Media Freedom - Middle East and North Africa  
Pernille Glynning, Denmark, International Media Support  
Shanthi Kalathil, USA: Media Advisor, US Agency for International Development  
Ross Kaplan, USA: MEPI Political Officer, US Department of State  
Rania Khalaf, Egypt: Journalist, Al Ahram Weekly  
Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia: Special Media Advisor to the Saudi Ambassador in London and former Editor, Al-Watan  
Mark Koenig, USA: Senior Media Advisor, US Agency for International Development  
Daoud Kuttub, West Bank: Director, Institute of Modern Media/Al-Quds TV  
Aralynn McMane, France: Director, Training and Education, World Association of Newspapers  
Salah Negm, UAE: Deputy Director General, Al-Arabiyah/MBC  
Jacky Perkins, Regional Expert, Engaging with the Arab World, British Embassy Bahrain  
Biljana Tatomir, Hungary: Media Program, Open Society Institute  
Mark Whitehouse, USA: Director, Media Development, IREX  
Dina Zorba, Jordan: Publisher, Al Sharqiat Group

15. Day one set the framework for development of specific recommendations by discussing the obstacles to and prospects for reform of the journalism profession, media as a business, and media law in the region. Participants with applicable expertise discussed the situation in their country and their field which brought about lively discussion, exchange of experiences, and several recommendations per topic. Day two focused on the development of specific recommendations from the Arab media professionals to donors and implementers as they develop strategies and implement projects.

16. Several common themes emerged from the discussions over the first two days. Arab media professionals expressed sincere interest to forge partnerships with donors and implementers, suggesting that local Arab organizations could serve as the main partners while donors and implementers could play the auxiliary role. Participants stressed the importance of including women in all media assistance

activities and asked donors and implementers to encourage media organizations to provide equal opportunities for career advancement for women. The participants stressed the need for media assistance to focus on developing local capacity and maximizing existing capacity to avoid repeating the use of "parachute" trainers.

¶17. Daoud Kuttab of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University/Al-Quds TV/AmmanNet constructively shaped much of the dialogue and persuaded many of his colleagues of the need for a holistic approach that recognizes the interdependence of journalism, media as a business, media law, and media support organizations, including associations, syndicates, unions, training institutions. Kuttab emphasized a holistic approach by MEPI (together with other donors) must be coupled with political support, including sustained high-level USG consultations with Arab governments to create space for free and independent media.

¶18. The workshop also identified research on audience attitudes and preferences, progress in media development, and successful strategies and approaches in the region and elsewhere as a common theme that should be integrated into assistance.

¶19. Day three of the workshop featured a working visit to three media houses at Media City in Dubai. At MBC/Al Arabiya, members of the workshop toured studios and the newsroom at MBC and the newsroom at Al Arabiya. MBC is considered a "family channel" with primarily entertainment programming and several news programs. Al-Arabiya is a 24 hours news channel. The two stations share facilities and many staff members. Al-Arabiya conducts paid training for other stations and journalists and anticipates opening a training center to expand its training capacity. Participants met with Al-Arabiya's Executive Editor, Abdul Sattar Ellaz, Business Manager Khan, and Director of News, Salah Nagm.

¶10. Nagm claimed that State broadcasters' news programs are the most watched. Nagm expressed interest in regional networking, providing local stations international news from Al-Arabiya, as well as providing training for regional media.

¶11. Participants next visited Dubai Television's news studios, meeting with Samer Hamzeh, News Center Director. Dubai TV, a state-owned broadcaster, reflects the ability of the richer gulf states to support the latest in studio and production equipment, a situation that is not standard throughout NEA countries. Dubai TV's news facilities were equal to or better than MBC/Al Arabiya.

¶12. Participants finished with a visit to CNN Arabic, which also serves as its Gulf Bureau and the main center covering terrorism regionally. Caroline Faraj, editor, discussed the role of the bureau, which also is responsible for producing Inside the Middle East, a CNN International program. Faraj indicated that approximately 50% of the hits on CNN Arabic come from the United States.

¶13. Participants identified dozens of recommendations to donors and implementers in the topic areas discussed at the workshop. The full set of recommendations will be presented in the final workshop report drafted by IREX. Below are priority recommendations identified by the participants.

¶14. Journalism:

-- Enhanced professional training opportunities are very much needed by journalists, editors, and other media technical support personnel throughout the MENA region. However, training support will prove more effective if donors in close consultation with local partners design programs that address several concerns (See next three points).

--As much as possible, training should be conducted in

Arabic by local, Arabic trainers. International and U.S. specialists can surely contribute, but their work should include serious attention to the training of trainers.

--Technical assistance should be provided to local university journalism faculties that are open to change, and also to existing or newly emerging mid-career media training institutions serving the MENA region.

--Sustained follow-up activities can greatly increase the effectiveness of training, including long-term coaching, refresher courses at progressively more advanced levels, and creation of real opportunities for trainees to publish or broadcast their work. For example, following a course on investigative journalism, participants might be offered a platform, such as a web publication, where their latest investigative work might be published. Also, editors should be included in training, so that they understand and better accept new techniques being introduced by newly re-trained journalists upon return to their news rooms.

--Careful selection of training participants, in consultation with local partners, is important. Participants in each group of any training activity should start at a similar level of preparation (i.e., beginning, middle-level, or advanced).

#### ¶15. Media Business:

--Participants stressed the importance of skilled business managers in media enterprises but also emphasized the lack of sufficient people to fill this need. Therefore training was emphasized with a focus on comprehensive and sustained programs such as support to executive development, training series, certificate programs, and management schools. Advertising, marketing, general strategic management, use of research are all areas that need to be addressed.

--Audience and market research was repeatedly stressed as a vital need. The workshop recommended that such research be supported, that media managers be trained in its use, that international research standards be applied, and that emphasis be placed on developing independent and competent groups to conduct such research.

--Local media and new technology were singled out as needing special emphasis in developing a sustainable business model. Both media are relatively new to the region; and, if they are to develop further, they will need sound management skills.

--Participants stressed the need for translation of documents on management practices, business training materials, and research into Arabic.

--The workshop suggested that one consider a gradual shift from free to fee-based training that would develop the sustainability of management courses, institutes, and in-service training.

#### ¶16. Media Law:

--State ownership, domination and controls over the media constitute the most fundamental barrier to developing free, independent media in the MENA region. Thus, Arab government officials need to be constructively engaged by U.S., international organizations, and other donor government officials to increase awareness of the considerable benefits of freer media - and to ease fears regarding any (mis)perceived drawbacks to more open media systems.

--Training of more media law lawyers, jurists, and other media law specialists is needed in the MENA region.

--Support for independent media industry associations and other capacity-building in the general areas of media law advocacy, alliance building, and lobbying are also needed.

--Internet information data bases (in Arabic) should be

established to provide sample legislation and expert commentary on the best international practices for ensuring enabling environments for free media. Particular attention could be devoted to successful legal practices from fellow Muslim (or otherwise similar) national media systems.

--In sum, greater visibility is needed to stress the key importance of media law reforms. Training and advocacy activities should involve media-sector NGO representatives, parliamentarians, government officials, jurists, and other pertinent decision-makers.

¶17. Print and Internet: (The Print and Internet section covered specific needs of these two media, although many of the needs were identified in the journalism, business, and media law sessions described above.)

--For Internet, participants recommended more training on how to make the internet a viable business model. Sustainability may not be immediately achieved, but Internet business skills will prove vital as internet media develops.

--For Internet, participants expressed general need for the technical training for media's specific needs - web design, use of proxy servers, interactive tools, etc.

--Most press syndicates in the region remain state-dominated, and therefore unable to defend the professional independence of their members. As a result, participants recommended either the fundamental reform of existing syndicates, or support for the creation of new, more independent professional associations.

¶18. Broadcast:

--The broadcast section covered specific needs of the broadcast industry, although many of the needs were identified in the journalism, business, and media law sessions described above.

--The workshop emphasized the importance of supporting emerging local private media - local radio, community radio, local television. These media are not widely accepted by Arab governments nor are most of those existing highly professional. Furthermore, neither the satellite nor state broadcasters discuss local issues, leaving an information vacuum and a focus on issues such as Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

--There was significant support for and discussion of local production in radio and television. Participants encouraged support to production of public affairs, news, documentaries, and human-interest series on radio and television.

--Support was encouraged for special reporting on broadcast media - human interest, issues-bases reporting, coverage of civil society, social reporting, etc.

--The issue of the transition from state to public broadcasting received much attention. Most participants observed that state broadcasters were not currently suited to modern demands and did not meet the criteria of being a public service. Therefore, without specific agreement, the participants noted the importance of following and staying engaged where possible in true reform efforts, e.g., as in Morocco.

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PRESS COVERAGE  
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¶19. US Ambassador to the UAE Michele Sison delivered the welcome remarks, emphasizing the United States' willingness to provide support to political, economic, and social reforms, however underscoring that reform must come from within the region itself. Her remarks were carried in four major Emirati dailies. The articles were positive,

highlighting the USG's focus on getting media assistance recommendations directly from experts in the region.

¶20. The UAE's largest daily also interviewed some of the workshop participants at the conclusion of the workshop. The interviews were parlayed into a full-page feature article by UAE columnist Ali Al Amoudi that appeared on October 14 in the Arabic daily Al-Ittihad (circulation 85,000). He reiterated the goals of the workshop as stated in the press release, and extensively quoted from President Bush's speech at the graduation ceremony of the University of South Carolina describing MEPI. In the body of the article, he interviewed workshop participants Rafia Taleih, Dawuud Kettab and Dr. Hussein Amin, describing their reactions to each session. They praised the fact that the workshop provided an opportunity to exchange opinions. Dr. Hussein was quoted, "We need media reform, because it is connected to political and economic reform and we should benefit from the U.S. experience because it is developed in these areas." Rafia stated, "We shouldn't be close-minded and reject openness just because this workshop is coming from the U.S. and because we have different points of view regarding U.S. foreign policy. These programs are going to serve us and our potential to strengthen freedom of media, democracy and educational reform."

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COMMENTS:  
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¶21. Several visa issues arose which should be noted for future workshops in the UAE. In the NEA region only GCC citizens can travel visa free to UAE. Using the normal channels (through local sponsorship by the hotel or airline) can mean that last minute participants will not receive visas. Since sponsorship is through hotels, most of which use a private tour agency, one must pay special attention to the process. Given the processing time needed by immigration authorities, late substitutions should be avoided to the maximum extent possible.

¶22. Participants and Ambassador Sison expressed strong, positive feedback on the workshop. Beyond their enthusiasm for the produced recommendations, participants were particularly impressed by and appreciative of MEPI's effort to consult with Arab media professionals, rather than the perceived current method of having strategies and programs imposed on them by MEPI and BMENA. The participants asked that this model of consultation and contribution to the development of donor and implementer strategies and programs continue.

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